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ABSTRACT

A comparison is made between six state-adopted fourth-grade California history textbooks dating from 1940-1965 and seven textbooks adopted since 1980. The author's observations suggest that although overall changes between older and newer texts have been dramatic, the new books vary widely among themselves. Changes between older and newer texts include (1) a tendency for new texts to focus more on change and the limits and problems that accompany growth than on progress and growth, (2) a renewed emphasis on the rights of individuals as compared to an earlier emphasis on the duties of citizenship, (3) a growing respect for diversity among individuals and cultures, which replaces the once-prevalent concept of the "melting pot," and (4) a tendency for newer texts to aim for a more balanced and realistic presentation of facts. Two suggestions for making content more relevant are proposed. Texts used in the comparison include "California Beginnings" (Lola B. Hoffman, 1948), "Our California" (Irmagarde Richards, 1952), "California Yesterdays" (Irmagarde Richards, 1957), "Long-Ago Stories of California" (Rambeau and Rambeau, 1957), "A Child's History of California" (Enola Flower, 1958), "California: A History" (Mabel Young Williams), "California: Your State" (Ester Crabtree and others, 1983), "California, Its Place in the World" (John Jarolimek and others, 1983), "California" (June Chapin and others, 1984), "California!" (Kevin Starr, 1980), "California History: The Study of Your State" (Joan Schrerber and others, 1984), "California: Yesterday & Today" (Durlynn C. Anema and others, 1984), and "Our California" (Carlos E. Cortes, 1983). (LH)

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**IN SEARCH OF THE REAL CALIFORNIA:
HISTORY IN THE FOURTH GRADE TEXTBOOK**

Richard DeLuca

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Paper presented at the CLIO Conference (Berkeley, CA, August 22, 1984).

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This paper was first presented on August 22, 1984, at the CLIO Conference, "History in the Public Schools: What Shall We Teach?", held at the University of California, Berkeley.

The earliest known description of a place called California is found in a Spanish tale of chivalry titled Las Sergas de Esplandian (The Adventures of Esplandian) published in Spain around the year 1510. Historians suspect that this popular fictional tale traveled with the Spanish explorers and influenced the naming of their California colony. The relevant passage reads:

Know that on the right hand of the Indies there is an island called California, very near to the terrestrial paradise...peopled by black women, without any men among them...for they live after the manner of Amazons... Their arms were all of gold and so were the saddle cloths of the wild beasts they rode.¹

Here is another description of a mythical California:

Once upon a time white men did not know there was any such place as California, for no travellers had been there...Only the Indians, simple and peaceful, dwelled in all that vast region...You must not think that the California Indians were like some of the other Indians you have read about. The California Indians...were not always on the warpath trying to kill one another. The California Indians were peaceful. There was plenty of food everywhere. There was no need to fight...Life was easy and lazy for these Indians.²

This second description was written more than four hundred years after the earlier one. The words were first published in 1940, as fact not fiction, in a textbook titled, appropriately enough, A Child's History of California. By 1949 the book was in its fourth printing, and was adopted by the State Department of Education as part of its California State Series of textbooks. The copy I have quoted from is a

seventh printing, revised edition dated 1958, nearly twenty years after the book's original publication.

With regard to those texts we now use in our fourth grade classrooms, the school year in which students first learn the history of California, how far have we come from the fabulous history that was written once upon a time several decades ago? How close are we to capturing the real California in our current fourth grade textbooks?

Textbooks, of course, are an important resource, second only to the classroom teacher in the teaching of California history. Education Week reported in the spring of 1984 that, on the average, nearly 75% of class time is spent using textbooks.³ The State of California has just recently adopted a new series of history/social science textbooks for grades K-8, and school districts are ordering, from among the adopted books, those texts to be used in our public schools until the early 1990s.⁴ Most of us are aware that elementary school history texts today look different from those that we ourselves used in school, but what about the history in these books? How has it changed?

To investigate these questions, I examined 13 texts, six dating from 1940 to 1965, and seven published since 1980. All have been or are currently adopted for statewide use by California's Department of Education.

The six old textbooks referred to in this study are:

- . California Beginnings, Lola B. Hoffma State Department of Education (1948)
- . Our California, Irmagarde Richards, State Department of Education (1952)
- . California Yesterdays, Irmagarde Richards, State Department of Education (1957)
- . Long-Ago Stories of California, Rambeau and Rambeau, State Department of Education (1957)
- . A Child's History of California, Enola Flower, Caxton

Printers (1958)

- . California: a History, Mabel Young Williams, State Department of Education (1965)

The seven new texts include:

- . California: Your State, Ester Crabtree, et al., Ginn & Co. (1983)
- . California, Its Place in the World, John Jarolimek, et al., MacMillan Publishing Co. (1983)
- . California, June Chapin, et al., McGraw-Hill Book Co. (1984)
- . California!, Kevin Starr, Peregrine Smith, Inc. (1980)
- . California History: The Study of Your State, Dr. Joan Schrerber, et al., Scott, Foresman & Co. (1984)
- . California: Yesterday & Today, Durlynn C. Anema, et al., Silver Burdett Co. (1984)
- . Our California, by Dr. Carlos E. Cortes, Steck-Vaughn Co. (1983)

All of these textbooks are available at the Library of the California Historical Society.

Overall, changes have been dramatic, both in the content and the treatment of the history in the new textbooks. But a strong word of caution is necessary: the new books vary widely among themselves. One is not as good as another, despite the fact that all are state-adopted texts and that all, in one way or another, may be considered an improvement over what was.

The dramatic changes in the new texts can be characterized by several sets of words-words such as "progress and change", "growth and limits", "rights and duties". Whereas old texts, even as late as 1965, speak proudly and often of progress and growth, today's books speak only of change, and more often than not, of the limits and the problems that accompany growth. This change of view was heralded in the first sentence of the state curriculum guidelines for history/social science published

by the Department of Education in 1981, which reads: "We share a world that each day becomes smaller than it was the day before."⁵

Yesterday's text also emphasized the duties of citizenship; today, on almost every page, we stress the rights of individuals. Most important of all, the new texts celebrate diversity, in individuals, in cultures, in our history-to the extent that the once-prevalent concept of the "melting pot" is openly challenged. It has been suggested that perhaps America today more closely resembles a tossed salad than a melting pot.

It appears, then, that in today's 4th grade textbooks we have done no less than a complete flip of the coin on some of the values underlying comparable history written a quarter century ago. Let's look at some specific examples.

The American takeover of California in 1846, and the short-lived Bear Flag Revolt that preceded it, because of the many local and national factors involved, are complicated events to explain. A 1965 textbook, California: A History, introduces the Bear Flag episode this way:

Americans (in California) hoped that California would one day belong to the United States. These Americans wanted more and more Americans to come to California. They wrote to their friends...told them about their new home...(and) asked their friends to join them in California. More and more Americans became interested. More and more Americans did come to California.⁶

Even if you knew nothing of the event and were learning of it for the first time, as for example a fourth grade student, you could almost sense that somehow, for some reason, the real motive has not been stated, but rather was glossed over

in the name of simplicity. This attitude, so prevalent in older texts, contributed to their fabulous tone. By contrast, Scott, Foresman's new text treats the matter this way:

The first Americans who lived in California were adventurers who came on their own. Once they settled in California, they learned new ways of life...The settlers who came in the 1840s were different. Most of them came with their families. When they arrived in California they wanted to live as Americans and bring up their children as Americans...Like many Americans at this time, the settlers believed that the United States had a right to take over all of the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans...This idea was called Manifest Destiny.⁷

The second explanation is not only more to the point, but also shows a greater respect for the facts of the matter, which in turn implies a greater respect for the reader. As a result, the more balanced presentation is not only closer to historical truth, but also more real, more believable to the student.

The effect is not easy to achieve, and in my opinion none of the newly-adopted texts succeed as well as California History: A Study of Your State, published by Scott, Foresman & Co. Though all of the recent books aspire to the change of view mentioned earlier, some aim for balance by leaving almost nothing out, resulting in complete confusion. Others are poorly organized and poorly written, however well intended. And there is still an occasional lapse of judgment. For example, in commenting on the fighting that followed the initial American takeover of California, California: Yesterday and Today states:

In northern California, the takeover by the Americans went smoothly. But southern California was a different story.⁸

Note the bias implied in those two sentences, particularly in that one word, "smoothly". Compare that account to this, in Scott, Foresman:

The Californios fought bravely, but in the end the Americans took over California.⁹

But criticism and caution aside, clearly and undeniably, we have come a long way from where we once were, a long way toward treating the history in our fourth grade textbooks more realistically.

Making the contents of these books more real, however, brings its own problems. In part it is a problem of space. There is a good deal of history to cover, and to do so in a balanced manner requires room to tell the story fully and fairly. But history has steep competition in the fourth-grade textbook, not only from other topics such as geography and civics, but also from the need to shape all of this material to fit educational objectives and to teach developmental skills. As a result, the newly-adopted texts vary considerably in the amount of history they contain, according to each publisher's interpretation of the state's curriculum guidelines. The Macmillan & Co., Ginn & Co. and McGraw-Hill texts allot less than 30% of their pages to California history. At the other extreme, the Steck-Vaughn Co. and Peregrine Smith texts are almost entirely narrative history, yet neither actively engages the fourth grade student, and California!, from Peregrine Smith, is exceptionally difficult in its detail. The remaining two books fall toward the center, mixing fact with skill development and history with related topics. Not

surprisingly, these two texts, published by Scott, Foresman and Silver Burdett, appear to be the most popular with school districts-though in my opinion the Scott, Foresman book is, by far, the better of the two.

But the problem of making content real is more than just making room for history. It takes more than sheer bulk, more even than balanced treatment, to make history come to life.

All the books mentioned, the old as well as the new, hold to what I would call a linear, time-line approach to California history. Yet the most real part of our past is that which has happened most recently. That is the portion that touches our lives most directly; that is the portion that is most real because it is real to us. A linear approach that begins somewhere in the distant past and unfolds history chronologically, year after year, puts what is most real furthest from the starting point, furthest from our understanding. And that is a limitation that all of these books share-even the best of the new.

How else can it be done? I would suggest two possibilities. First, we can hold to a linear approach but shorten the time-line under the early periods of California history, thereby shifting the story's emphasis to the twentieth century. This is not only the century that holds more meaning for Californians today, teacher and student alike, it is the century in which by far the greatest number of all Californians have lived. Why not balance the sheer weight of history in years with consider-

ation of its present worth to those people, or groups of people, most affected by it?

Second, historians can search out moments in our history, especially our more recent history, whose significance extends beyond the mere facts they contain. Too often in the writing of history, the narrator-historian stands somewhere "back there", secure in the past and isolated from concerns of the present. To make history more real, however, we must also learn to stand "up here," closer to reality, and to feel comfortable doing so: to stand, for example, on Alcatraz Island in the year 1969, and to watch 200 years of American and California Indian history roll toward us, not away from us, and culminate in the attempt to re-claim that island. With this change in perspective, the traditional story of the Indian as seen from "back there"-his removal from the land and near-extinction-becomes a remarkable tale of survival, one in which the struggle continues, not only as history but as part of the present as well.¹⁰

As historians we must learn to stand in many different places, each with a unique perspective on the history we write. Then the diversity of the stories we tell will come to match the diversity that is all around us, and in the process we will have made California history as real as it can be.

NOTES:

1. Spanish and Indian Place Names in California, by Sanchez, 1922, p.15.
2. A Child's History of California, Enola Flower, 7th printing revised edition, 1958, Caxton Printers, Caldwell Idaho, The quotation is taken from the book's dust jacket and from p. 15.
3. New York Times, April 10, 1984, About Education.
4. Program Descriptions for History-Social Science Instructional Materials, State Department of Education, Office of Curriculum Framework and Textbook Development, Sacramento, 1983.
A Price List and Order Form for History-Social Science Instructional Materials, 1984-86, is also available from the same office.
5. History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve, State Department of Education, Sacramento, 1981, p.v.
6. California: A History, p.188.
7. California History: The Study of Your State, p. 69.
8. California: Yesterday and Today, p. 133.
9. California History: The Study of Your State, p. 69.
10. "We Hold the Rock! The Indian Attempt to Re-Claim Alcatraz Island", by Richard DeLuca, California History, Vol. LXII, No 1, Spring 1983.